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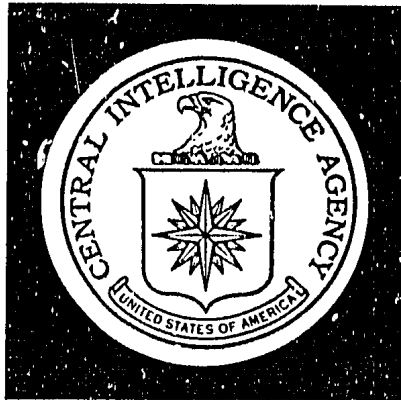
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SPECIAL MEMORANDUM

De Gaulle's Troubles in Black Africa

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1 March 1968
No. 4-68

CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY
OFFICE OF NATIONAL ESTIMATES

1 March 1968

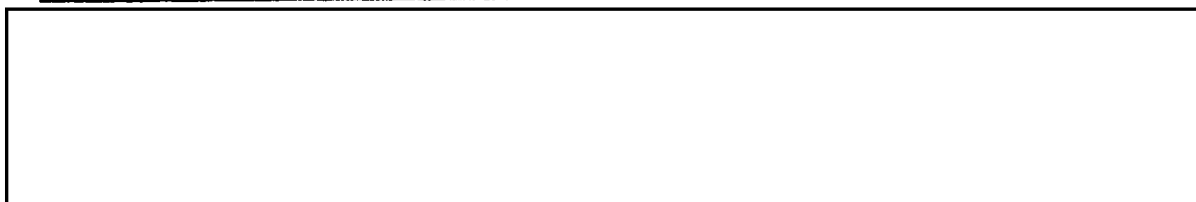
SPECIAL MEMORANDUM NO. 4-68

SUBJECT: De Gaulle's Troubles in Black Africa*

SUMMARY

The hitherto serene relations between de Gaulle and his client rulers in black Africa are now becoming troubled, as some frustrated African leaders seek alternatives to continued dependence on France. Also, French arms sales to South Africa, trade with Rhodesia, and mercenary activities in Nigeria and the Congo are for the first time arousing adverse reactions in Africa. For the US, de Gaulle's growing troubles pose something of a problem. We have counted on the French to maintain a measure of tranquility in the francophone mini-states of West and Central Africa. But, when African rulers fall out with de Gaulle they tend to look first to the US to replace France as their patron.

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Introduction

1. The principal lines of French policy toward sub-Saharan Africa have not changed much in recent years.* President de Gaulle still considers an impressive French presence in Africa to be an important element in France's claim to great power status. Until recently France was able to maintain preponderant influence over its former colonies without the dramatic embarrassments and loss of prestige suffered by the UK and Belgium in their African affairs. Furthermore, de Gaulle could do virtually as he pleased elsewhere on the continent, selling arms to South Africa or trading with Rhodesia, without risk of serious criticism. Indeed, in last spring's referendum in French Somaliland, de Gaulle's officials were able to deport pro-independence Somalis and otherwise ensure a pro-French majority in the vote, without incurring an adverse reaction from the independent black African states. But, apparently times are changing, and of late France is finding it more difficult to have her cake and eat it too.

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Stirrings in Francophone Africa

2. Several of de Gaulle's black African clients are now becoming less docile in their acceptance of French influence in sub-Saharan Africa. The heart of the problem is that most rulers of the former French colonies have always strongly resented their dependence upon the French for the continued functioning of government and public services. Some now openly claim that de Gaulle denies them sufficient aid to stimulate economic growth in order to keep their states in bondage to France. Other grievances have built up over the years since independence, fed by real or imagined slights and discourtesies by individual French residents. Sporadic efforts by these regimes to diversify their sources of external aid have borne little fruit, and this has intensified their resentment of the French presence and French policy towards them.

3. African resentments broke out into the open early in February when Presidents Tombalbaye of Chad and Bokassa of the Central African Republic (CAR) joined Mobutu of Congo (Kinshasa) in declaring a new regional grouping, the United States of Central Africa. Its founders describe it as a common market

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aimed at ending French domination of the economies of Chad and the CAR, mainly by substituting Congolese "services." Invitations have also been posted to Rwanda, Burundi, and Congo (Brazzaville). This hastily devised and still nebulous union may never get off the ground. Mobutu may lose interest, and in any case, it is hardly conceivable that a lumping together of some of Africa's most primitive states with the chronically unstable Congo can provide any meaningful substitute for French aid, or for the French backed Economic and Customs Union of Central Africa.* There is a possibility, however, that the contagion of open defiance might spread to other countries where France has a greater stake, e.g., Gabon, Ivory Coast, or Cameroon.

4. Perhaps in a calmer moment the two rebellious African presidents will seek some sort of reconciliation with France. It is not too late, even though Tombalbaye has jailed his principal French adviser, and has ceased to communicate with the French ambassador. The Africans, after all, have much more to lose than does de Gaulle from a rupture of relations. The major tangible French interests at stake are the military and air base in Chad,

* Composed of Chad, CAR, Congo (Brazzaville), Gabon, and Cameroon.

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used as a staging area for the deployment in Africa of France's 11th Airborne Intervention Force, and French rights to the exploitation of uranium deposits in CAR. Neither appears to be vital to France. On the other hand, a substantial French pull-out would leave organized government in Chad and CAR in a shambles, and most modern aspects of life in these countries would soon disappear. Moreover, if deprived of French military support, Chadian counterinsurgency efforts against rebelling Moslem forces in eastern Chad would be in danger of collapsing.

5. Events in Dahomey since last December have been equally displeasing to France. Here economic and political stagnation has brought about a more familiar result, the overthrow of the regime. Though the incoming government initially took a pro-French stance, it ran into immediate trouble with Paris. De Gaulle has come to accept coups as a normal, though regrettable, method of effecting political change in Africa. But in this case, he viewed the ousting of President (General) Soglo by junior army officers as in particularly bad taste. Not only did it set an unfortunate precedent for discontented junior officers in other African military regimes, but the victim of the coup had

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just returned to Dahomey from a ceremonial visit to the Elysée. Mainly for these reasons, de Gaulle personally ordered termination of Dahomey's budget subsidy and a suspension of other aid. The Dahomean treasury is empty, and junta leaders have found no way to appease de Gaulle. He is unmoved by their pleas, and may not now be much interested in retaining France's traditional position in Dahomey.

6. Strangely enough, de Gaulle is willing to pay a heavy price to lure poverty-stricken Mali back into the French financial fold, a course which may in time prove embarrassing as well as expensive. Mali, after some years of attempting to build a socialist state with aid from Communist countries, turned to France for financial help. After much haggling, the Malians have agreed to rejoin the franc zone, accepting thereby French control over its currency, foreign debts, and state economic enterprises. France promised some \$130 million to help Mali meet payments on its foreign debt, and another \$12 million for temporary budget support. Since nothing has yet been done about liquidating the unprofitable state enterprises, the outlook is for continuing Malian budget deficits, and more appeals to Paris for subsidies.

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7. It is difficult to see what France expects to gain from this. French cultural influence continued to be substantial even during Mali's most radical phase, and is not likely to increase much. There is, of course, a certain psychological boost for de Gaulle in the return of a prodigal son. But the possibilities for building French political influence in Mali seem remote. Over the last few months Bamako's Communist-inspired radicals have gained some ascendancy over pro-French political figures, and even the staying power of President Keita, architect of the rapprochement with France, is in some doubt.

French Policy Elsewhere in Africa

8. Meanwhile French interests, mainly commercial, are expanding in English-speaking Africa. Though de Gaulle publicly adheres to the UN embargo on trade with Rhodesia, in practice he permits purchases of Rhodesian minerals and the barter of French textiles for Rhodesian tobacco. In the larger South African market, French business interests are expanding sales, including a wide range of armaments, which the US and UK, because of their declared policy not to aid apartheid, will not deliver. Elsewhere,

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France is extending a new aid program to Malawi, and taking a considerable interest in developing closer relations with Zambia.

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bringing forth public criticism by Africans. Resolutions of the recent Organization of African Unity Foreign Ministers Conference specifically blamed France and others for selling arms to South Africa, and France alone for thwarting independence in Djibouti. President Kaunda of Zambia spoke out recently against French policy toward southern Africa, and ordered termination of aid

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discussions with France while awaiting an assurance that Paris would not take up a new arms order for South Africa. Mobutu was dismayed at the subservience to France displayed by some franco-phone rulers at the last meeting of the Afro-Malagasy Common Organization (OCAM) meeting, and came away with renewed suspicions of French intentions in tropical Africa. Even newspapers in such a francophile state as Senegal have taken to sniping at French policy in Dahomey, and warning Paris about arms sales to Pretoria. In both Lagos and Paris, journalists are inquiring into the French mercenary presence in Biafra [REDACTED]

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Outlook and Implications

11. De Gaulle still holds a formidable array of carrots and sticks for coping with his fractious Africans. French culture is an important link: more than 10,000 black Africans attend French universities and schools, and 5,000 French teachers instill Gallic values and tastes in African children. France holds a virtual monopoly of radio, television, and press services in much of French-speaking Africa. On the political and economic front OCAM, comprising 14 former French and Belgian colonies, meets

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periodically in a heavily pro-French atmosphere. More important are the French aid funds, of \$300- 400 million annually, with which de Gaulle rewards the loyal or punishes the unruly. Finally, French armed forces, in cooperation with French advised or led local forces, stage demonstrations in Africa of military power, with implications of a willingness to employ it in certain circumstances on behalf of pro-French African rulers, as they did in Gabon in 1964.

12. Thus, de Gaulle still may not be much inhibited from choosing whatever African policy suits him. But French actions will be more closely scrutinized by increasingly vocal African critics. Further French arms sales to South Africa are likely to bring forth some strident complaints. And the whole French system of controls over its satellites will probably be attacked as neocolonialist by both beneficiaries and outsiders. The French still have a great deal at stake in tropical Africa and are not likely to pull back very much. They may resort to more subtle methods of control over countries where French interests are considerable, or where African leaders accept French paternalism. Those francophone regimes unwilling to play the game

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by French rules are not likely to receive special concessions from Paris, and if relations deteriorate, may find themselves abandoned by de Gaulle.

13. There is always a possibility that Communist powers would be invited by frustrated Africans to fill the French role. Most francophone states already have diplomatic relations with the USSR, and some receive modest amounts of aid from the Soviets. But Moscow takes a cautious approach, and normally avoids actions which would displease the French. It has thus far remained aloof from the Dahomey imbroglio, and we see no indication that the Soviets are prepared to furnish the funds and manpower to support inherently unstable regimes with dim economic prospects in backward areas of Africa. Communist China is less likely to receive an invitation, because most francophone leaders are distrustful of Peking. Even if invited, it is doubtful that the Chinese would provide the type and quantity of aid needed to keep these countries afloat.

14. Though US interests in former French Africa are minimal, de Gaulle's growing troubles there pose something of a problem to the US. A strong French presence in francophone Africa is

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generally regarded by most Westerners as a cushioning against local political instability, and a deterrent to the growth of Communist influence. Thus, from the US point of view the stabilizing value of France is largely nullified when French domination drives the Africans to seek greater independence. Distraught African rulers tend to look first to the US to replace France as their patron. But US ambassadors have already counseled those African rulers who have recently fallen out with de Gaulle not to look for increased aid from Washington, nor to expect, merely because of French-US policy differences elsewhere, that the US would back their case against de Gaulle. Indeed, other considerations aside, in practical terms it would be virtually impossible for the US to provide sufficient French-speaking specialists to replace the French.

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